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ABSTRACT

Several public school choice programs are reviewed, and the model program implemented by the Montclair (New Jersey) Public Schools is evaluated. School choice models include: the regulated voucher system, alternative schools, and magnet schools. The Montclair system is an urban school district that has achieved success in desegregating its schools through a voluntary magnet school plan based on choice. Montclair has a total enrollment of 5,104 students, of which 49% are minority students. To study the effectiveness of Montclair's plan in providing racial balance across schools and educational quality and diversity in programs through the use of choice, a case study of the district was conducted in 1987 and a follow-up was completed in the summer of 1989. The choice program allows parents to select the school that they wish their children to attend and register that choice with the central office. The research methodology used to assess the Montclair magnet system involved combining qualitative data (interviews, observation, and document reviews) with quantitative data (standardized tests, enrollments, and census data). Areas assessed include the level of racial integration at the school and classroom levels, general racial climate, quality of education, school climate, curriculum and instruction quality, and program diversity. A 41-item list of references, three figures, and eight data tables are included. A discussion of the case study method is appended. (TJH)

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A POLICY INFORMATION PAPER

CHOICE IN MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

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CHOICE IN MONTCLAIR, NEW JERSEY

A POLICY INFORMATION PAPER

Beatriz C. Clewell and Myra F. Joy
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Educational Testing Service, Princeton, New Jersey

January 1990

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Foreword

The interest in "choice" in public education has surged according to Gallup Polls and a few comprehensive approaches have been initiated. Yet, there is little by way of rigorous evaluations of apparently successful working models.

In 1987, ETS researchers Beatriz C. Clewell and Myra F. Joy evaluated the choice program in Montclair, New Jersey, and found it to be meeting the goals it had set for itself. The ETS Policy Information Center, in the summer of 1989, asked Clewell and Joy to re-visit Montclair, update their information, and write a concise paper that would provide information for use in the Center's newsletter, ETS *Policy Notes*. I believe the resulting paper is worth making available in its entirety.

Choice in Montclair opens with a review of the several available choice alternatives and what the research has so far had to say about them. In this context, the authors present a case study of Montclair's choice program. Previous research, their own research, and their Montclair evaluation have led them to conclude that the magnet school approach holds the most promise for meeting the diverse objectives of choice, while avoiding the deepest of the pitfalls. We are pleased to make their research – and their conclusions – available in the first Center "Policy Information Paper."

We thank the authors for their willingness to extend their Montclair work, as well as the Montclair school system for its assistance. At ETS, Margaret Goertz and Gita Wilder reviewed the paper. Richard J. Coley of the Center served as editor and created the graphics. Rod Rudder designed the series cover. Carla Meadows provided the desktop publishing expertise.

Paul E. Barton
Director
ETS Policy Information Center

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The authors acknowledge and appreciate the support of the Montclair Public Schools in conducting the original evaluation.

Beatriz C. Clewell
Myra F. Joy

Introduction

Montclair, New Jersey is an urban school district that has achieved success in desegregating its schools through a voluntary magnet school plan based on choice. To study the effectiveness of Montclair's plan in providing racial balance across schools and educational quality and diversity in programs through the use of choice, the authors conducted a case study of the district in 1987 and a follow-up in the summer of 1989. This paper reviews a variety of public school choice programs and describes and evaluates the Montclair model. The paper outlines the factors contributing to the district's success and offers some recommendations concerning the development and implementation of similar public school choice plans.

Varieties of Choice Plans

While the idea that parents should have the right to choose their children's school is not a new one, there has been a resurgence of support for public school choice around the nation. A 1986 Gallup Poll found that 68 percent of public school parents would like the right to choose their child's public school (Gallup, 1986). That same year, the National Governors Association endorsed public school choice (NGA, 1986). In this most recent revival of interest in choice, the public dialogue has been tempered by a consideration of the effects of choice on other educational goals such as excellence, equity and racial balance, and diversity of program offerings. The result has been an assessment of the various school choice plans in light of their ability to meet these goals, as well as to enhance parental choice.

In general, proponents of choice argue that it will:

- promote educational excellence,
- increase parental involvement in the schools,
- encourage varied program offerings, and
- improve racial balance.

Opponents, on the other hand, feel that choice will:

- result in better educational opportunities only for White, middle class and talented students,
- increase transportation costs for the school district,
- cause resegregation of schools, and
- result in a lack of diversity in program offerings.

Given the variety of school choice plans, however, the question becomes not only whether choice in and of itself promotes or inhibits particular other educational goals, but also what is the relative effectiveness of each of the choice plans in meeting these goals. The following section, therefore, will review briefly each type of plan and its effectiveness in promoting quality education, achieving racial balance, and providing diverse educational program offerings.

Although several school choice models exist in theory (Zerchykov, 1987), only a few have actually been implemented. Even fewer have any kind of research evidence on which to base an assessment. These models are: the regulated voucher system, the alternative school, and magnet school plans.

The Regulated Voucher System

Implemented most notably in the Alum Rock Union Elementary School District in San Jose, California from 1972-77, this pilot demonstration project gave vouchers to parents that were used to select any district public school. The school would then turn in the vouchers in exchange for cash.

Researchers found that students of parents who exercised choice performed no differently on measures of achievement than the rest of the student population (Cappell, 1981). In terms of promoting equity and racial balance, researchers found that Alum Rock school district's racial balance was slightly better after the experiment than before it. But the researchers also found race and class differences in the levels of awareness about the choices that were available, with educated Whites having the greatest awareness of choice options (Bridge & Blackman, 1978; Cappell, 1981). Alum Rock did offer as much diversity as was found in any studies of magnet or alternative schools (Rasmussen, 1981; Thomas, 1978). It has been the opinion of researchers that the Alum Rock experiment produced practically no conclusive results about public school voucher systems (Esposito, 1988; Raywid, Winter 1985).

Alternative Schools

Alternative schools were created as options to traditional neighborhood schools. In a choice system, they are accessible to all students (Esposito, 1988). By providing different learning approaches that represent valid methodological or thematic alternatives to traditional schools, alternative schools appeal to a wide variety of students who, for one reason or another, prefer the particular educational program offered by an alternative school.

According to research on student performance in alternative schools, students in these schools showed greater academic achievement than did students in traditional schools (Raywid, 1985; Smith, 1978). In general, alternative schools appeared to be no more segregated by race or class than regular schools, although there was some evidence of class stratification within individual schools (Raywid, 1982). These schools did seem to provide diversity. In a survey conducted by Raywid (1982), 57 percent of the responding schools identified a specific teaching method as their distinguishing feature and half reported a curriculum specialization.

Magnet Plans

Magnet programs and schools were originally developed as an alternative to forced busing in large urban school districts and have often been implemented as a result of a court order to desegregate, the threat of a court order, or a voluntary decision of the community to establish a magnet program (Joy & Clewell, 1988).

Magnet programs promised to help bring about desegregation while still providing students and parents with a choice of educational setting and institution by attracting students of all racial groups to distinctive, high-quality course offerings not available in neighborhood schools. Esposito (1988) describes the three main types of magnet plans: (1) a few magnet schools used within a district to achieve desegregation, (2) an interdistrict plan that uses magnets to increase transfer rates across districts, usually from city to suburb and vice versa, and (3) a system made up exclusively of magnet schools.

Of the three school choice plans discussed in this paper, magnet schools have been studied the most. Much of the research revolves around two major issues of controversy: How effective are magnet plans in achieving desegregation? Do magnet schools provide a distinctive quality education to all students?

Evidence exists that magnet schools have been successful in achieving racial balance (Blank, 1984; Metz, 1986; MAGI Educational Services, Inc., 1985). Although Orfield (1982) maintains that no urban school district has ever achieved full desegregation, Royster, Baltzell and Simmons (1979) and Rossell and Clarke (1987) found that magnet schools have been effective in helping a school district achieve its desegregation goals. Much of a magnet program's success in achieving desegregation depends on factors related to its implementation and on district characteristics. Rossell and Clarke (1987) found that comprehensive magnet-voluntary plans ultimately produce more interracial exposure than mandatory plans. These researchers also identified several school district characteristics (discussed later in this paper) that predict desegregation success (Rossell & Clarke, 1987). Several studies have argued the effectiveness of controlled choice plans involving magnet schools in desegregating a school system (Alves & Willie, 1987; Clewell & Joy, 1987; Rossell, 1987; Rossell & Glenn, 1988). Under controlled choice students are not guaranteed an assignment to a particular school, although students are allowed to enroll in their preferred schools as long as the racial balance in that school is maintained (Alves & Willie, 1987).

Magnet school programs have been criticized for not providing equal access to all students and for absorbing an unfair share of already scarce resources (Carrison, 1981; Dorgan, 1980). The issue of equity is also discussed by McMillan (1980) who, together with Rossell (1979), sees the danger of racially balanced magnets resulting in imbalanced non-magnets in a school district. Magnet programs have been accused of placing an unfair burden on inner-city residents (usually minorities) by displacing them to make room in inner-city magnet schools for Whites (Alves & Willie, 1987; Rossell, 1987). Selective magnets have been criticized for "creaming" top students from other schools, thus weakening the non-magnet schools in the district (Davenport & Moore, 1988; Esposito, 1988). There is also the danger that, while encouraging desegregation at the school or district level, magnet schools can experience resegregation in the classroom through tracking practices (Epstein, 1980; Eyler, Cook & Ward, 1983; Rosenbaum & Presser, 1978).

Several studies document the fact that magnet school students generally achieve at higher levels (Alkin, 1983; Blank, Dentler, Baltzell, & Chabotar, 1983; Bortin, 1982; Comerford, 1980; Fleming, Blank, Dentler, & Baltzell, 1982; Larson, 1981;

MAGI Educational Services, Inc., 1985; Smith, 1978; Weber, McBee, & Lyles, 1983). Also, magnets have been found to have higher student attendance rates, fewer behavioral problems, and lower suspension and dropout rates than comparable non-magnets (Blank, 1984; MAGI Educational Services, Inc., 1985).

Although there seems to be no doubt that magnet schools provide quality education for students, some researchers have expressed concern that self-selection affects research results. Rossell (1985) has pointed out that there have been few systematic analyses that take into account the effect of self-selection, while there is some evidence that more able students attend magnets (Blank et al., 1983; Comerford, 1980; Royster et al., 1979). Clewell and Joy (1987), in their evaluation of an all-magnet system, however, found that the achievement of all students in the system improved after the implementation of the magnet plan.

Because one of the characteristics of a magnet school is its theme, or focus, it is logical that magnet programs would provide diverse programmatic offerings. Evaluations of several different magnet programs have concluded that most of the magnet schools in those programs have a strong program identity (Blank, 1984; Clewell & Joy, 1987; MAGI Educational Services, 1985). Metz (1986), however, points out that schools with distinctive programs may be forced to standardize and homogenize their character to appeal to "all" parents in order to increase enrollments.

Although much of the research on magnet school effectiveness has focused on the success of magnets in achieving racial balance and providing quality education to all students, magnets also seem to present the most acceptable alternative for enhancing parental choice. A 1986 Gallup Poll revealed that parents appear to rate magnet schools very highly (Gallup, 1986). Some see the use of magnet schools as a relatively non-controversial way of accomplishing desegregation, as the "greatest practical impetus to the extension of public school choice" (Rossell & Glenn, 1988, p. 77). In surveys of public school parents, Rossell and Glenn (1988) also found "widespread" support for voluntary desegregation plans, particularly when the plans include magnet schools. These researchers also found that although support for choice within a desegregation plan is even greater among minority parents than among White parents, White support for magnet schools is great enough that these and other voluntary tools could conceivably desegregate a school system.

The body of research on magnet school plans suggests that of the three types of school choice plans discussed in this paper, magnet plans appear most promising in meeting the educational goals of achieving racial balance, providing quality education, and offering diverse educational programs.

The Montclair Model

Montclair, New Jersey provides an interesting model of an urban school district that has achieved success in desegregating its schools through a voluntary magnet school plan based on choice, while enhancing educational programs, improving stu-

dent achievement, and providing program diversity. The environment in which the plan was implemented has both urban and suburban characteristics and contextual factors that might be expected both to help and hinder support for a desegregation plan. This section describes the Montclair Magnet Plan and provides the findings of an evaluation conducted recently of the effectiveness of the plan in meeting its goals.

Demography of Montclair

Montclair is an urban school system located 12 miles from New York City. It is primarily a residential community in which most of its working population commutes to New York or Newark. Its median income of $30,635 in 1980 was substantially above the state average of $22,906. Approximately 40 percent of its residents hold college degrees.

Montclair's Black population has increased from 24 percent in 1960 to 29 percent in 1980, but Black representation in the public schools in 1980 was 45 percent and close to 49 percent in 1988. Despite high taxes, Montclair continues to attract both minority and non-minority families, many from nearby New York and Newark, who want the advantages of the suburbs along with the amenities of an urban area. Minority families moving into Montclair are very supportive of the school system. Some non-minority families continue to opt for private and parochial schools. About one of five of the community's school-age children attends a private or parochial school, compared with the national average of one of ten.

History of Desegregation Efforts

Despite the urban flavor of Montclair, housing patterns have, until recently, been relatively segregated, causing a racial imbalance in school enrollments, which reflected the population of the neighborhoods. The magnet school plan was adopted in 1976 to address the segregation, under threat of losing state education funds. The adoption of this plan followed trial of at least seven other plans that included forced busing. These earlier proposals caused much conflict and turmoil, accelerating White flight and thereby increasing the proportion of minority enrollments in the schools. The 1976 plan included developing several magnet schools and redrawing some district boundaries. Montclair was given a year for planning by the state during which time a Citizen's Task Force was established to provide input for the plan and to talk with parents and teachers to enhance support. The plan included establishment of a gifted and talented program in a predominantly minority school to attract White students and a fundamental program (a traditional, structured program emphasizing the basics) designed to attract Black students in a predominantly White school.

The plan, with some modifications in 1979 and 1982, worked well for about five years, at which point some racial imbalance was occurring. By 1985, due to a gradual enrollment decline, an increase in minority enrollments, and the choice of many affluent White parents to send their children to private schools, the stability of the plan was threatened. Furthermore, some parents had become concerned about the inequity of the resources between magnet schools and those without special

programs, "neighborhood schools." To address these concerns, and prevent resegregation of schools, the magnet plan was broadened in 1985. The new plan eliminated all neighborhood schools by designating all Montclair schools as magnet schools (except the one district high school). This basic plan is the one currently operating, although programs have been added and refined over the years as needed. District resources across schools are now equalized. Montclair recently received a grant to refine and expand some programs, develop some initiatives to enhance academic performance, and continue to upgrade staff training.

The Montclair Schools

Montclair has a total building enrollment of 5,104 students, of which 49 percent are minority; 43 percent are Black. The school system contains six elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. The average teacher-pupil ratio in the elementary grades is 1 to 20; in the middle schools, 1 to 16.2, and in the high school, 1 to 14.6. The special focus programs are gifted and talented, fundamental, international, science and technology, and a recent Montessori program within one of the fundamental schools. All schools, however, have a basic core curriculum that is consistent across grade levels.

Procedures

To study the effectiveness of Montclair's plan in terms of providing racial balance across schools and providing educational quality and diversity in programs through use of choice, the researchers used a case study approach, combining quantitative data (such as standardized test scores, enrollments, and census data) and qualitative data collected through reviews of reports and other documents and interviews with knowledgeable informants. The original study was conducted in 1987, with a follow-up in the summer of 1989. The major part of the data collection was accomplished through interviews with and observation of individuals in the schools – principals, teachers, students, and parents – and central office staff, members of the board of education, and individuals in the community. More information on the study's methodology is included in Appendix A.

How Choice Works

Montclair's magnet system is considered a voluntary plan in that parents and students select a school, rather than being assigned to one. The school district provides transportation for all students. Table 1 shows the proportion of students bused to each school. Every elementary school has over half its student body bused, indicating that a majority of parents are selecting a school outside their neighborhood. Among elementary schools, Bradford and Edgemont have the largest proportion bused (78.6 percent and 71.8 percent respectively in 1988-89). Both are considered "fundamental schools," and are located in predominantly White neighborhoods. Edgemont has a Montessori program as well. The schools with the largest enrollments from the neighborhood (the lowest portion bused) are Watchung (a racially mixed neighborhood) and Northeast (which is predominantly White). Mt. Hebron

Middle School has a higher portion of its student body bused than Glenfield Middle School (80 percent vs. 62 percent).

Montclair's plan relies totally on choice to achieve racial balance. Parents select the school they wish their child to attend and register that choice with the central office. So long as racial balance in the schools is maintained and the school is not over enrolled, the child will be assigned to the school of choice. Individuals moving into the district in mid-year may be assigned to a school on the basis of available space, and those who register late may not get their first choice. Over 95 percent of parents get their first choice of schools.

TABLE 1
PERCENT OF MONTCLAIR STUDENTS BUSED TO SCHOOL, 1988-89

Elementary Schools	
Bradford	78.6
Edgement	71.8
Hillside	65.0
Nishuane	70.9
Northeast	64.1
Watchung	58.4
Middle Schools	
Glenfield	62.2
Mt. Hebron	79.7

Source: Montclair Public Schools, Unpublished data.

Based on the interviews, the researchers found that parents believe they have total choice in selecting schools and like the concept of choice. However, parents select schools for many different reasons. Parents at the fundamental and gifted and talented schools talked about program and style, including school climate, environment, and leadership. They selected schools they felt appropriate for their child's needs. Another consideration, however, is location – many parents select the school closest to them. One trend that central office staff noted is that there is a lot of transferring to another school when students reach the third grade. Parents may want to keep their child close to home for pre-kindergarten through second grade and to see how the child performs in school before actually selecting a program. By the time their child is in third grade, the parents have some basis on which to make a choice. Another basis for choice is the principal and staff in a particular school. Facilities, size of the school, and atmosphere were also mentioned. At the middle schools, many believe the major choice is on style, since the curriculum of the two schools is similar. It was clear from the interviews that most parents were informed about the different programs and differences in the schools. Several principals indicated that parents are less likely to complain about a school and are more involved with its programs if they select it. Montclair parents are involved in the schools, and were part of the decision-making process when new programs were planned.

Freedom of choice has created a certain degree of competition among the schools. Since unsatisfied parents have alternatives, principals must make sure their programs are working well and produce good results. In several schools where enrollments dipped, principals were replaced and new programs started to improve the school.

One drawback to a choice plan, cited by teachers and principals, is that parents may not always make the most appropriate choice for their child. They may choose the gifted and talented school because it sounds impressive, rather than because it is most suited to their child's needs. Also, even though information is available to parents, many do not read it or take advantage of visiting days at the schools to get the information they need to select a school. School district personnel work closely with all pre-kindergarten teachers in the town, including Head Start teachers, to tell parents when and how to register and provide them with information. Despite these efforts, some parents, particularly those of Head Start students, are still late signing up and may not get their first choice.

The next section of the paper reviews Montclair's program against three criteria: racial balance, improving the quality of education for all students, and increasing program diversity.

Racial Balance

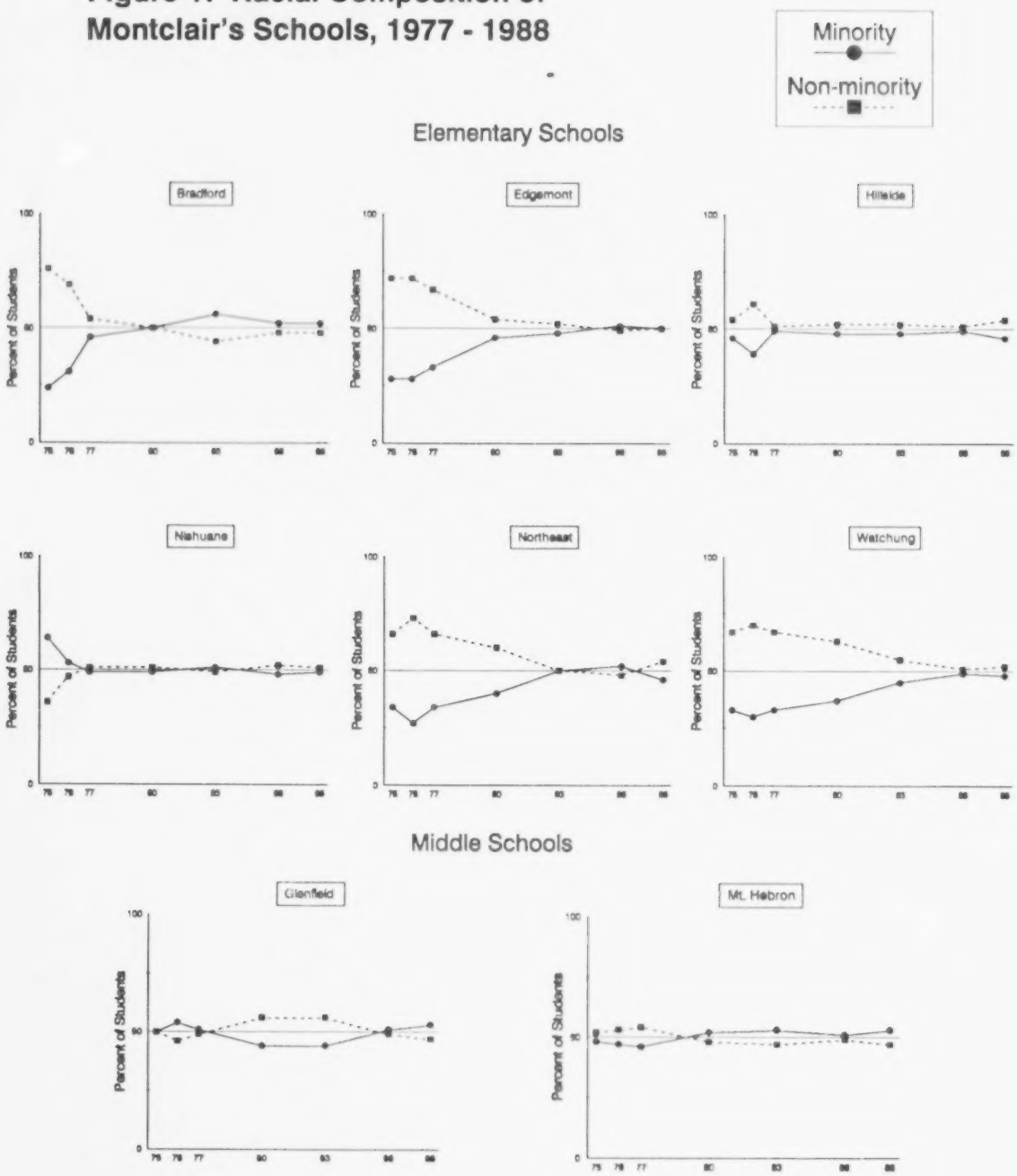
Montclair's magnet plan was developed and implemented to desegregate its schools. Figure 1 shows the school by school enrollments before and after implementation of the plan (see also Appendix Tables 1 and 2). In 1975, one year before development of the plan, overall minority enrollment in elementary schools was 43 percent. There were several schools with extreme racial imbalance: Bradford (24 percent minority); Edgemont (28 percent minority); and Glenfield (74 percent minority). With implementation of the plan, which also included closing two schools, Montclair was able to achieve a better racial balance among all schools. By 1977, Bradford, the first fundamental school, went to 46 percent minority enrollment and Edgemont to 33 percent; Glenfield was closed. Nishuane and Hillside, which became gifted and talented schools, both achieved racial balance with enrollments of 49 percent minority and 51 percent non-minority.

During the next few years, although there was some shifting of enrollments, the racial balance was maintained. Since 1986, enrollments have stabilized and racial balance has been maintained. The total minority elementary school enrollment in 1988 was 48 percent. The range of each school's enrollment in 1988-89 was between 46 percent and 52 percent.

Middle school enrollments showed a similar pattern. Hillside, the most segregated school, was closed, and Mt. Hebron and Glenfield were able to maintain racial balance in their enrollments. In 1989, total middle school enrollment was 53 percent minority and both Mt. Hebron and Glenfield's minority enrollments represented that same proportion of minority students.

Thus the racial mix in every school is well-balanced, even though total enrollments may have increased or decreased. It is important to note also, that because there is a substantial minority population in the school system, every school is able to have a critical mass of minority students to prevent them from being a small isolated group.

Figure 1: Racial Composition of Montclair's Schools, 1977 - 1988



Source: Montclair Dept. of Research, Planning and Evaluation, Report of Enrollment Figures, September 1986 and October 1988.

When the researchers conducted the follow-up in 1989 they also looked at the socio-economic level of each school by obtaining data on the proportion of students eligible for free and reduced school lunch in each elementary and middle school. These data are presented in Table 2. The range in 1987 was 6.4 percent in Glenfield to 27 percent at Edgemont, with a district average of 13.5 percent. All but two schools were within four percentage points of the district average. In 1988, the district-wide average increased to 19.2 percent, but all schools, except Bradford and Edgemont at 29 percent, were within six percentage points of the district average. These figures indicate that Montclair's schools, with a few exceptions, are relatively well-balanced on this measure of socio-economic status.

TABLE 2
FREE AND REDUCED LUNCH BY SCHOOL
(ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL)

	1988			1987		
		F/R Lunch			F/R Lunch	
School	Enrollment	N	%	Enrollment	N	%
Bradford	330	96	29.1	320	51	15.9
Edgemont	298	88	29.5	270	73	27.0
Hillside	525	95	18.1	523	58	11.1
Nishuane	670	114	17.0	657	77	11.7
Northeast	352	59	16.8	353	51	14.4
Watchung	371	80	21.6	353	61	17.3
Glenfield	577	78	13.5	564	36	6.4
Mt. Hebron	473	81	17.1	469	66	14.1
Total	3,596	691	19.2	3,509	473	13.5

Source: Montclair Public Schools, unpublished data.

Integration in the classroom. An important aspect of achieving racial balance is to assure that there is racial integration within the classrooms and that resegregation does not occur at that level. In elementary schools, classes are grouped heterogeneously and efforts are made to assure good racial and gender balance. Enrollments in every grade level at every school are carefully monitored. At the middle schools and high school, it is more difficult to determine racial balance at the classroom level, since students change classes and choose electives, but homeroom assignments are carefully monitored.

One area cited where racial balance has not occurred is in the honors and advanced classes, especially at the middle and high schools. Minority students are underrepresented in these classes. The district is addressing this problem through a bridge program at the middle schools and an early bridge program at the elementary level to identify high potential but underachieving minority students and provide them with academic enrichment and reinforcement. In one school, the principal personally monitors standardized test scores to spot potentially bright students who have been overlooked. In that school there is good minority representation in the advanced classes.

General racial climate. The researchers found good racial relations among staff and students in the schools. Maintaining racial balance among staff and providing positive minority role models is given a high priority by the school system. As is shown in Table 3, approximately 28 percent of supervisors and administrators and 29 percent of education professionals (teachers, counselors, etc.) are minority. Overall, the researchers found good relations between Black and White staff and no indications of problems or tensions. Teachers of different races seemed at ease with each other and worked well together. Teachers also indicated that they felt at ease with students of another race, although some found it difficult to work with a diversity of students.

TABLE 3
TEACHING AND ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF (JANUARY 1, 1989)

	Non Minority		Minority		Total
	N	%	N	%	N
Supervisors/ Administrators	21	72.4	8	27.6	29
Educational Professionals	293	71.1	119	28.9	412
Paraprofessionals/ Aides	42	43.7	54	56.3	96

Source: Montclair Public Schools, Affirmative Action Employment/ Contract Compliance Report, 1988-1989.

In every school visited, students of different races mixed well, both in classrooms and during lunch or playing together on the playground. Although in the high school, and to some extent in the middle schools, all-Black or all-White groups of students were observed, there were interracial groups as well. The magnet schools are believed to contribute to formation of interracial friendships by bringing together students from many different neighborhoods, helping students to form new friendships in school based on mutual interests and classroom assignments. Many of the students interviewed indicated that one of their three best friends was of a different race.

There was also a conscious effort in the district to promote cultural understanding. Posters and displays showed balance and representation of races and gender. Black History Week and Martin Luther King's Birthday were used as opportunities to enhance awareness of the contribution of Black people in all areas. Where there were special activities – sports, safety patrol, class officers and the like

– both Black and White students participated. In one school the principal made a special effort to encourage minority students to run for student council.

Improving Quality for All Students

In addition to achieving racial balance in the schools, the quality of education provided through a choice plan is a crucial factor in assessing its effectiveness. Performance in reading and math as measured by Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) scores has improved since implementation of the magnet schools in 1977. As is shown in Figure 2, the percent scoring below grade level in math and reading has declined at all grade levels (see also Appendix Tables 3 and 4). Additionally, as shown in Figure 3, the mean percentile scores in math and reading show a general upward trend from 1984 to 1988 (see also Appendix Table 5). These achievement data indicate that Montclair students are performing well and that academic performance has improved since implementation of magnet schools as measured by the ITBS.

Although many factors may have contributed to the improvement in test scores, the data indicate that implementation of the magnet schools has not caused a decline in reading and math achievement levels, and may have been a factor contributing to improved performance. Certainly, the stability brought about by the magnet system after a period of turmoil in the schools is believed to have been a factor contributing to better performance.

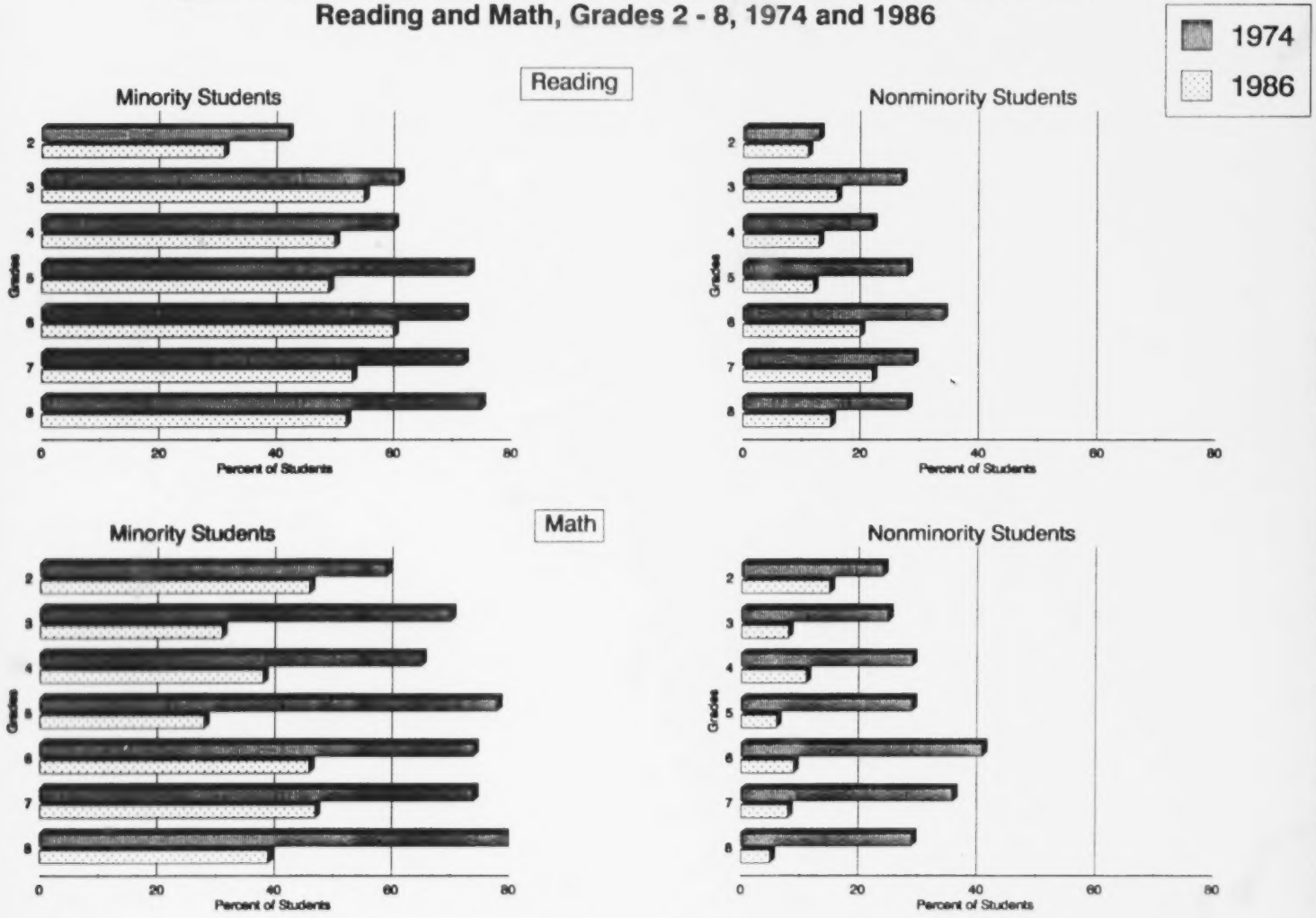
Despite the achievement gains and overall academic performance of Montclair students, the data show differential performance between minorities and non-minorities. Montclair has been making special efforts to increase the performance of students who are underachieving in basic skills through such efforts as the local bridge program and state Basic Skills Improvement Program (BSIP). The district has also recently received funding to implement several new initiatives that start in lower grades to improve basic skills performance of students.

School climate. The researchers found a favorable school climate and a comfortable environment for learning. All buildings were clean, well kept and in good condition and appeared to be a secure environment for the students. Most schools had a "firm, but not rigid" norm of behavior that conformed to the district behavior code, although some schools were more strict and structured than others. Behavior problems were usually not serious and there was no vandalism or violence in the schools.

Most principals have a relaxed and informal relationship with both teachers and students. Their doors are always open and they seemed to know students by name. Principals clearly set the tone for the schools. Assignments and school programs are not static and principals are held accountable for the performance in their schools.

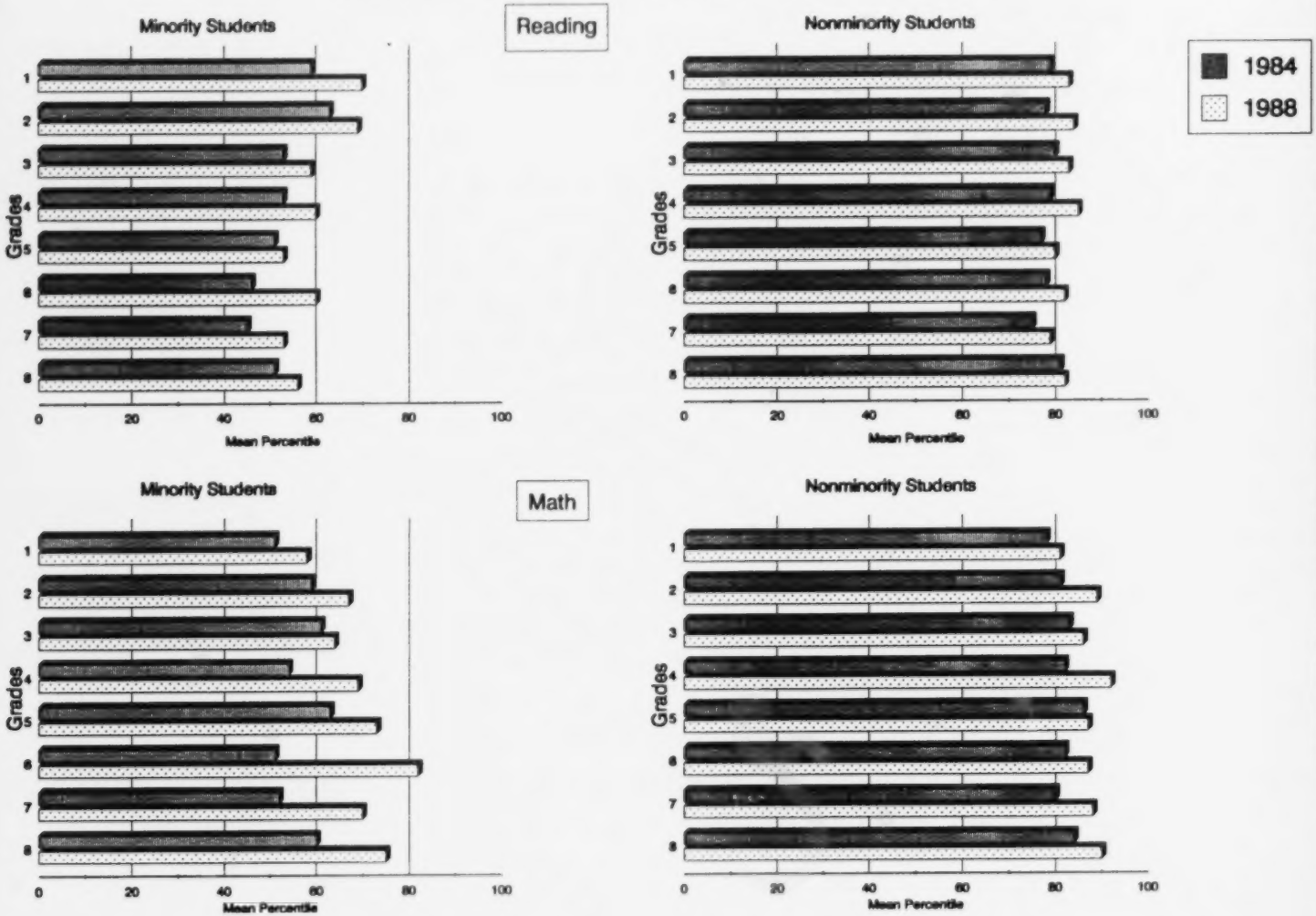
Principals and teachers at all schools visited were aware of and supportive of their school's stated goals and for the most part felt their particular school was fulfilling its goals. The fundamental schools, with an emphasis on basics, had a more structured,

Figure 2: Percentage of Montclair Students Scoring Below Grade Level, Reading and Math, Grades 2 - 8, 1974 and 1986



Source: Montclair Public Schools, Dept. of Research, Planning and Evaluation

Figure 3: Montclair Student Performance on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, (Mean Percentile), Reading and Math, 1984 and 1988



Source: Montclair Public Schools, Dept. of Research, Planning and Evaluation

disciplined (yet, in most cases, friendly) atmosphere and the gifted and talented schools, with more flexible curricula, were more relaxed and informal. This difference also met the desires of parents, who often selected a school on the basis of atmosphere and style.

Generally, students expressed satisfaction with their school, their teachers, and what they were learning. Students knew the rules and believed they were fair. They indicated that teachers expected good performance, and were available for extra help when students needed it.

In most schools, teachers were satisfied with the leadership, working environment, and quality of education provided. All teachers were supportive of the magnet system and its goals. They indicated the system's main advantages were the choices it offered and the diversity of programs and learning opportunities to suit a child's need.

Curriculum and instruction. Curriculum review and careful monitoring of programs have been an on-going process to help assure the effectiveness and attractiveness of the magnet schools. In 1985 there was a comprehensive review and revision process that involved members of the school board, central office staff, building staff, and parents. The curriculum was standardized across schools and grade level objectives were set for all subjects, so that all schools share a common core curriculum and have additional emphases according to special focus.

Principals can select their teaching staff. With implementation of the first magnets there was substantial turnover to place many of the best teachers in the magnets. Since that time, staff have become more stable at schools. Staff are very professional and well-trained; most have taken credits beyond the bachelor's degree. Teachers and principals set high expectations for students and believe all students can succeed.

Diversity of Programs

Both teachers and parents cited the diversity of programs as a major attraction of the Montclair school system. Parents feel that there are differences across schools and that they can choose a school based on the needs of their child.

The initial magnets were a fundamental school and two gifted and talented schools, one for pre-kindergarten through second grade and one for second through fifth grades. The gifted and talented schools do not have admission requirements, but rather have the philosophy that all students are gifted and talented in some areas. There are special advanced courses for the students who are more talented academically and other courses for students in their special talent. Since 1977, an additional fundamental magnet has been developed, with a basic arts program which has an affiliation with Lincoln Center. The original fundamental school has added a junior great books program. The other elementary magnets include an international program, with an emphasis on foreign languages and a science and technology magnet, with a strong emphasis on environmental sciences. In the last two years

Montclair has made additional efforts to enhance programs and provide new equipment in these latter two schools. The most recent magnet is a Montessori program, housed within one of the fundamental schools. Parents have been very active in expressing the desire for new programs and the need to enhance others, and it has been partially as a result of various parents' advisory committees that many changes in programs came about.

The major difference between middle schools is on the basis of style, but programs continue to change there as well. A recent change in principals at one of the schools will undoubtedly lead to some changes in style and atmosphere at that school.

Factors Contributing to Montclair's Success

Montclair has been successful in implementing a magnet school plan that relies on choice to achieve racial balance and provide a quality education for all students through a diversity of programs. Its success is due to many factors including the type of school district and community as well as leadership and careful planning.

Montclair is different from many urban districts in several ways. First, it is a smaller school district than many that have tried to desegregate through magnet schools. It is not at all clear that larger districts would be able to employ all the same tactics that Montclair has used. Transportation is somewhat easier to provide than in many larger districts. Montclair provides transportation beyond what the state reimburses, in order to make all programs accessible to all students, so that parents actually do have total choice in selecting a program without concern about transportation. The relatively small size of Montclair also made communication with the community and publicizing the plan easier. School officials were able to meet with small groups throughout the community.

Montclair is also a suburban setting, so that many of the problems that were occurring concomitantly with early desegregation plans and that may have contributed to White flight did not occur there. Montclair was able to eliminate all neighborhood schools and make all its schools magnets with some special program, thereby avoiding the problems that are caused when magnets attract the best students into a few schools, leaving the non-magnets to cope with the lowest achievers. Moreover, once the initial magnets had been established, resources were equalized across the schools. School assignments are voluntary and based on choice, a factor that has been found to be important in achieving greater racial balance through magnet plans (Rossell & Clarke, 1987). Because of the district's size, selection of school and registration are manageable.

Montclair's population is generally supportive of diversity and racial balance in the schools and places importance on maintaining a quality education for students. Montclair's population has relatively high levels of income and education. Such individuals are generally more supportive of equity goals and education programs than populations of lower educational and occupational status (Dye, 1968). Moreover, a large proportion of the Black population is professional and well educated, so there

is not as large a gap in terms of income and education between the Black and White population as occurs in some places.

Many of the new arrivals to Montclair come because of the schools and because they want a diverse population and many of the amenities of urban life in a suburban setting. Although only 18 percent of the current population have children in the public schools, the community is supportive of the schools and is willing to pay the high taxes necessary to support the school system. Much of this support can also be attributed to efforts of the superintendent in building community support and showing that the schools are careful in their use of resources.

The success of Montclair's plan, however, involved more than just favorable predisposing circumstances and population characteristics. The individuals responsible for planning and implementing the plan helped to produce a favorable environment and engender support for the system. The opposition to the previous plans in effect, particularly the forced busing, helped develop community interest and involvement in the plan. The actions of both the superintendent and the board of education during this period further increased the probability of success.

Research has suggested that community involvement in the planning of magnets contributes to their effectiveness in achieving maximum desegregation (Blank, 1984). Careful planning for appropriate programs also contributes to success in implementing magnet schools (Asher, 1985). The superintendent in Montclair increased community support and involvement during the planning phase by publicizing the magnet plan and forming a Citizens Advisory Task Force to participate in the planning process. Parents and community members are still involved in various task forces and the schools have formal mechanisms for parent input. Many of the program changes since 1977 have come about as a reaction to the concerns of parents.

The superintendent who developed and first implemented the magnet school plan undertook a thorough study of existing magnet school programs. He placed programs and resources strategically to achieve maximum desegregation, developed a sound implementation strategy, and obtained release time for a team of staff people to assist in the planning and implementation of the program. This last strategy was considered by some who were involved in the planning process to be a crucial factor in the plan's success. The Montclair Board of Education supported the superintendent's actions by voting for the resources to accomplish the plan and by endorsing the plan and its implementation.

Specific components of the plan that were at least partially responsible for its success were the placement of the gifted and talented programs in the predominantly minority schools and the fundamental programs in the predominantly White schools. Research has shown these strategies to be effective in achieving desegregation since White parents are attracted to gifted and talented programs, whereas minority parents prefer the fundamental programs (Fleming et al., 1982; Levine & Eubanks, 1980; Rosenbaum & Presser, 1978; Royster et al., 1979). Extensive renovation of the predominantly minority schools in Montclair also enhanced their attractiveness to White parents, as has been shown to be the case in other research (Levine &

Eubanks, 1980; Rossell, 1985). Elimination of attendance zones, accomplished in 1985, has also been shown to contribute to the success of magnet plans in small school districts (Rossell & Clarke, 1987).

Strong leadership at the district level is essential to the continued effectiveness of a magnet school plan (Blank et al., 1983). The present administration in Montclair continues to assure the success of the system by monitoring school enrollments and racial balance. Careful monitoring has prevented resegregation as shifts in population demographics occur. New programs have been developed as needed and other programs enhanced to improve their drawing power. The system is not static, but always adjusting as needed.

The magnet schools, under the leadership of their principals, continue to preserve their reputation for excellence, their positive teacher-student relationships, and their high levels of interracial interaction, all considered necessary for such a plan to succeed.

Lessons Learned

What can be learned from the success of Montclair's magnet plan? As mentioned above, the district possesses some characteristics that favor success. There are, however, other manipulable factors that also contributed to the plan's success. These were present at the various stages of development and implementation of the magnet plan:

Planning Stage

- Careful planning to ensure optimal program selection and placement.
- Strong and intelligent leadership to map the strategy for achieving implementation and increasing community support and involvement.
- Community involvement to increase support for the plan.

Initial Implementation Stage

- Gradual introduction of the magnets.
- Elimination of all attendance zones.
- Strategic placement of programs.
- Provision of transportation to all programs.
- Ensuring the attractiveness of all programs and buildings.
- Fostering continued parent involvement.
- Careful placement of staff.
- Effective leadership.

Continued Implementation

- Careful monitoring of enrollment patterns and programs.

- Refinement of programs as needed.
- Continued emphasis on encouraging parent involvement.
- Evaluation.
- Effective leadership.

Obviously, depending on demographic and other characteristics of the district, not all of the above elements can be achieved in all districts. For example, the elimination of all attendance zones might be more difficult in a larger school system. Other elements, however, such as community involvement and support, strong leadership, and careful planning and monitoring can be components of magnet plans in any district, no matter how different from Montclair.

The body of research on magnet school plans and programs suggests that of the school choice plans that have been implemented and evaluated, magnets present the best mechanism for achieving quality education, racial balance, and diversity of program offerings as well as parental choice. According to Esposito (1988), of all the choice systems in his study, choice within a district made up mostly or entirely of magnet or alternative schools seemed to bring about the most positive results. (Esposito cites Montclair, together with Community District 4 in New York City and Cambridge, Massachusetts as the most impressive.)

The Montclair experience as well as others have provided concrete examples of magnet plans that have been effective in meeting diverse educational goals over a period of time. Although it is acknowledged that no one choice model is best for all types of communities, much can be learned from successful models such as the Montclair school district magnet plan.

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Appendix A - Methodology: The Case Study Method

Previous research on both effective schools and magnet schools has emphasized the importance of qualitative data for addressing the major issues and identifying strengths and weaknesses of programs (Metz, 1986; Rosenbaum & Presser, 1978). The case study method may utilize both qualitative and quantitative data. Its particular strength, moreover, is its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence – documents, reports, observations, and interviews – to answer a "'how', or 'why' question about a contemporary set of events over which the investigator has little or no control" (Yin, 1874, p. 20).

In the present study, the case study method was chosen to assess how the Montclair Magnet School System met the criteria for effectiveness set out by the Montclair School District as follows:

- insuring racially/ethnically diverse student bodies
- improving the quality of education for all students
- having an impact on the overall community

The case study method used combined both extant quantitative data (such as standardized test scores, enrollment reports, and census data) and qualitative data collected through perusal of reports and other documents as well as interviews with individuals in the schools – principals, teachers, students – parents, members of the Board of Education and the PTA, central office staff, and individuals in the community. We believe that, given time and budgetary constraints, this approach provides the most accurate and useful description of how the magnet schools are working in Montclair.

We also felt that the evaluation should be placed in a historical and social context. In order to do this we examined available documents describing the changing demographics of the town of Montclair over a period spanning the pre- and post-implementation of the magnet school system. We attempted to trace the history of efforts to achieve school desegregation in the town, as well as the evolution of the magnet school system as a solution to problems arising from desegregation. We also interviewed people who had been in the community pre- and post-magnet implementation and who had been involved as planners, parents, and implementers of the magnets.

The Interviews

The heart of our qualitative data collection efforts were the interviews with school personnel, students, and parents. The interviews, which ranged in length from 45 minutes to 1-1/2 hours each, were structured around areas such as the learning environment, racial climate and interaction, curriculum and instruction, coordination, student achievement and educational quality, evaluation, parent and community involvement. Interview guides, which were semi-structured and open ended, drew on effective school and magnet school literature for questions. Separate guides were developed for each category of interview.

We conducted interviews at four of the six elementary schools, the two middle schools, and the high school. At the elementary and middle schools we interviewed at each school the principal, four teachers, four students, and two parents. At the high school we interviewed the principal, four teachers, and two parents. Also interviewed were central office staff (5), members of the School Board and PTA, and an individual from the Board of Realtors. All interviewees were promised anonymity as were the individual schools. Observations were conducted at all schools. These were not extensive and focused on the hallways, classrooms, lunchrooms, and playgrounds.

Students and parents at each school were chosen by the central office. We requested that each group for each school be racially balanced. Teachers were chosen randomly by us. We also looked for a racial balance in choosing teachers, but our other selection criterion – at least five years of teaching in the system – sometimes precluded an ideal racial mix of teachers. All other interviewees were chosen by us on the basis of their function or position in the school system or the community.

On the whole, we found the interviewees to be forthright and candid in expressing their perceptions of the school system. Wherever possible we have used their own words in an attempt to portray more vividly the institutional culture through the voices of its chief actors.

Advisory Panel Meeting

At an early point in the project, a meeting of experts in desegregation and effective schools research was convened. Participants included: Dr. Marvin Bressler, Princeton University; Dr. William Foster, Rutgers University; Dr. Bruce Hare, SUNY at Stony Brook; Dr. Christine Rossell, Center for Applied Social Science, Boston, Massachusetts; Montclair representatives were: Dr. Mary Lee Fitzgerald, Superintendent of Schools and Ms. Barbara Strobert, Director of Special Projects; Educational Testing Service Project Staff were Dr. Beatriz Chu Clewell, Project Director and Ms. Myra Ficklen Joy, Research Associate. The purpose of the meeting was to solicit input and advice concerning research design, including review of research questions, prompter questionnaire development, conduct of the interviews, and data analysis. We found the suggestions of the panel to be very helpful and have incorporated many of these into our final research plan.

Data Analysis and Reporting Approach

Our charge has been to describe the system as a whole rather than the individual schools. Thus, we have attempted to synthesize the interviews to provide a coherent and comprehensive view of the system from the perspective of a variety of persons involved in the system at different levels and in different capacities. The same approach has infomed our reporting of quantitative data. Wherever possible, we have avoided reference to a particular school except in the case of the high school. Our main purpose in analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data, therefore, has been to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the magnet school system as a whole.

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Appendix Table 1

Elementary Enrollments by School

School	1975 N	%	1976 N	%	1977 N	%	1980 N	%	1983 N	%	1986 N	%	Change 1975-1986	1988 N	%	Change 1977-1988	Change 1986-1988
Bradford																	
M	66	(24)	114	(31)	174	(46)	174	(50)	190	(56)	172	(52)		171	(52)		
N-M*	212	(76)	249	(69)	207	(54)	174	(50)	149	(44)	159	(48)		159	(48)		
T	278		363		381		348		339		331		+19%	330		-13.4%	--
Edgemont																	
M	93	(28)	81	(28)	86	(33)	93	(46)	112	(48)	132	(51)		149	(50)		
N-M	245	(72)	207	(72)	178	(67)	107	(54)	119	(52)	127	(49)		149	(50)		
T	338		288		264		200		231		259		-24%	298		+12.9%	+15.0%
Glenfield																	
M	186	(74)	148	(70)	Closed												
N-M	64	(26)	63	(30)													
T	250		211										--				
Grove																	
M	69	(45)	71	(46)	98	(50)	82	(55)	Closed								
N-M	83	(55)	82	(54)	98	(50)	67	(45)									
T	152		153		196		149						--				
Hillside																	
M	56	(46)	41	(39)	275	(49)	244	(48)	242	(48)	261	(49)		244	(46)		
N-M	66	(54)	63	(61)	289	(51)	268	(52)	267	(52)	267	(51)		281	(54)		
T	122		104		564		512		509		528		+332%	525		-7.0%	--

Appendix Table 1, cont.

Elementary Enrollments by School

School	1975 N	1975 %	1976 N	1976 %	1977 N	1977 %	1980 N	1980 %	1983 N	1983 %	1986 N	1986 %	Change 1975-1986	1988 N	1988 %	Change 1977-1988	Change 1986-1988
Nishuane																	
M	261	(64)	315	(53)	336	(49)	351	(49)	328	(51)	308	(48)		327	(49)		
N-M	145	(36)	277	(47)	347	(51)	370	(51)	315	(49)	330	(52)		343	(51)		
T	406		392		683		721		643		638		+57%	670		-2.0%	+5.0%
Northeast																	
M	85	(34)	60	(27)	120	(34)	155	(40)	172	(50)	180	(52)		162	(46)		
N-M	164	(66)	160	(73)	235	(66)	228	(60)	173	(50)	168	(48)		190	(54)		
T	249		220		355		383		345		348		+40%	352		-1.0%	+1.0%
Southwest																	
M	70	(44)	47	(41)	Closed												
N-M	90	(56)	68	(59)													
T	160		115										--				
Watchung																	
M	124	(33)	104	(30)	122	(33)	120	(37)	150	(45)	174	(49)		177	(48)		
N-M	250	(67)	238	(70)	253	(67)	203	(63)	184	(55)	178	(51)		194	(52)		
T	374		342		375		323		334		352		-6%	371		-1.0%	+5.0%

*N-M: Non-Minority

Source: Montclair Department of Research, Planning and Evaluation, Report of Enrollment Figures, September, 1986 and October, 1988.

Appendix Table 2

Middle School Enrollments by School

School	1975 N	1975 %	1976 N	1976 %	1977 N	1977 %	1980 N	1980 %	1983 N	1983 %	1986 N	1986 %	Change 1975-1986	1988 N	1988 %	Change 1977-1988	Change 1986-1988
Glenfield																	
M	255	(50)	248	(54)	300	(51)	270	(44)	305	(44)	294	(51)		304	(53)		
N-M	254	(50)	215	(46)	293	(49)	347	(56)	382	(56)	280	(49)		273	(47)		
T	509		463		593		617		687		574		+12%	577		-3%	--
Hillside																	
M	270	(38)	272	(39)	Closed												
N-M	437	(62)	426	(61)													
T	707		698														
Mt. Hebron																	
M	364	(48)	348	(47)	396	(46)	335	(52)	309	(53)	245	(51)		252	(53)		
N-M	396	(52)	399	(53)	465	(54)	312	(48)	270	(47)	239	(49)		221	(47)		
T	760		748		861		647		579		484		-36%	473		-44%	-2%

Source: Montclair Department of Research, Planning and Evaluation, Report of Enrollment Figures, September, 1986 and October 1988.

Appendix Table 3

Percent Scoring Below Grade Level (Reading)

Grade	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
							Minority						
2	42	48	45	49	NA	NA	32	NA	23	44	36	44	**31**
3	61	56	61	58	--	--	49	--	55	58	56	31	**55**
4	60	53	48	63	--	--	43	--	57	47	55	51	**50**
5	73	61	63	56	--	--	50	--	59	49	47	59	**49**
6	72	74	71	68	--	--	62	--	57	66	55	58	**60**
7	72	77	74	67	--	--	62	--	71	59	65	57	**53**
8	75	72	73	72	--	--	54	--	70	57	43	67	**52**
							Non-Minority						
2	13	19	11	22	--	--	17	--	12	12	17	11	**11**
3	27	30	17	29	--	--	14	--	19	22	16	13	**16**
4	22	19	20	23	--	--	14	--	21	17	16	19	**13**
5	28	22	24	26	--	--	9	--	18	21	18	15	**12**
6	34	31	28	29	--	--	12	--	19	19	17	23	**20**
7	29	35	27	27	--	--	17	--	23	16	17	16	**22**
8	28	30	29	25	--	--	16	--	18	9	13	17	**15**

Source: Montclair Public Schools, Department of Research, Planning and Evaluation.

Appendix Table 4

Percent Scoring Below Grade Level (Mathematics)

Grade	1974	1975	1976	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
							Minority						
2	59	68	61	59	--	--	46	--	59	51	48	46	46
3	70	57	66	61	--	--	51	--	40	50	33	38	31
4	65	61	56	70	--	--	53	--	52	48	50	49	38
5	78	63	75	58	--	--	52	--	43	46	34	40	28
6	74	72	74	71	--	--	61	--	48	56	47	41	46
7	74	74	80	71	--	--	56	--	59	43	53	46	47
8	81	69	73	70	--	--	54	--	50	45	38	49	39
							Non-Minority						
2	24	30	20	28	--	--	19	--	21	18	21	12	15
3	25	29	20	25	--	--	14	--	13	20	11	17	8
4	29	24	21	28	--	--	13	--	16	16	18	16	11
5	29	32	28	26	--	--	16	--	15	13	8	9	6
6	41	33	24	21	--	--	12	--	14	15	16	9	9
7	36	36	31	29	--	--	13	--	18	11	14	7	8
8	29	32	34	27	--	--	16	--	13	6	10	18	5

Source: Montclair Public Schools, Department of Research, Planning and Evaluation.

Appendix Table 5

Minority and Non-Minority Performance on Iowa Test of Basic Skills (Mean Percentile)

Grade	1984 Reading	1984 Math	1985 Reading	1985 Math	1986 Reading	1986 Math	1988 Reading	1988 Math
				Minority				
1	59	51	67	54	67	51	70	58
2	63	59	60	59	60	59	69	67
3	53	61	61	58	51	64	59	64
4	53	54	53	57	57	63	60	69
5	51	63	45	58	58	68	53	73
6	46	51	48	61	46	56	60	82
7	45	52	45	54	49	57	53	70
8	51	60	42	51	49	60	56	75
				Non-Minority				
1	79	78	79	78	81	81	83	81
2	78	81	80	84	80	81	84	89
3	80	83	80	78	80	86	83	86
4	79	82	74	82	81	86	85	92
5	77	86	77	84	80	91	80	87
6	78	82	74	84	76	84	82	87
7	75	80	73	84	75	84	79	88
8	81	84	78	80	79	87	82	90

Source: Montclair Public Schools, Department of Research, Planning and Evaluation.

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